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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION SOCIAL DEMS PLAN FOR 2010 ELECTIONS

¶1. (U) Sweden's opposition Social Democratic Party (SDP), the largest party in Parliament, held its 36th annual conference October 28-November 1. At the conference, the party decided its future domestic and foreign policy platforms -- all with an eye on the September 2010 general elections, when the SDP and its allies hope to win back the government from the center-right four-party coalition headed by Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt. This year's SDP meeting was historic because the policy conclusions do not reflect the final platform of the party, as the SDP is for the first time in modern history in a formal coalition with the Green and Left parties, whose positions on key issues, such as Afghanistan, differ markedly from those of the SDP.

¶2. (SBU) Left-leaning factions within the SDP -- drawing strength from the Left Party -- have caused internal divisions within the SDP camp, but party leader Mona Sahlin was ultimately able to lead the party to consensus on key issues. This year's conference theme was employment, reflecting both the SDP's historical labor focus and the main political issue for the 2010 elections. The SDP strategy going forward appears to be to focus on unemployment and criticize the current government's handling of the economic crisis. Sahlin declared she will "take back the job issue" from the center-right coalition through investments in education, higher levels of unemployment insurance, and reforms for small businesses.

¶3. (SBU) Foreign policy issues are less important in the SDP election calculus, but still contentious within the party. After an energetic debate, MP Urban Ahlin (SDP foreign policy spokesman and a key Sahlin advisor) engineered the final vote in favor of a platform of keeping Swedish troops in Afghanistan. (In contrast, the Greens are calling publicly for an exit timetable for the troops while the Left wants to pull them out immediately.) On the Middle East, some SDP delegates demanded sanctions against Israel, but the party leadership managed to shoot down the proposal. The SDP delegates did, however, vote in favor of removing Sweden's defense attache position in Tel Aviv.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Sahlin will now focus on developing a common election platform with her coalition partners -- but that may prove difficult, especially given the public disagreements between Sahlin and the Left and Green leaders on Afghanistan and other issues.  
BARZUN